Merkley, Wyden Announce Nearly $32 Million for Columbia River Basin Projects and Programs in Oregon

Targeted News Service

November 16, 2023 Thursday 8:17 PM EST

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Length: 1312 words

Byline: Targeted News Service

Dateline: WASHINGTON

Body

Sen. Jeff Merkley, D-Oregon, issued the following news release:

Washington, D.C. - Oregon's U.S. Senators Jeff Merkley and Ron Wyden announced today the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is investing $31,768,530 million across seven Oregon projects and programs to reduce toxics in fish and water, address climate chaos, and help restore the health of the Columbia River Basin.

The federal investments come from the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law's historic $79 million total funding infusion into the Columbia River Basin Restoration Program, which is proving essential to the Pacific Northwest's Tribes, communities, and economy that rely on the critical watershed. The Bipartisan Infrastructure Law was passed two years ago this week.

"Our rivers and waterways are the lifeblood of our communities. If they are dirty and polluted, our homes, schools, and businesses are dirty and polluted," Merkley said. "The federal investments for these homegrown projects and programs will drive solutions that lead to a cleaner, healthier Columbia River Basin for our communities, wildlife, ecosystems, and economy."

"The Columbia River Basin is a rich and essential part of Oregon's history, as well an integral part of our present and future," said Wyden. "Clean water is a key ingredient for thriving and healthy communities in the Basin. And I will continue to fight for federal resources just like these that protect this precious natural asset for generations to come."

Toxic pollutants can accumulate in water, sediment, and fish tissues. This threatens to decimate natural ecosystems and risk the health of Tribal communities and other Oregonians who consume affected fish populations.

To help tackle the issue, Senator Merkley--who serves as a member of the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee--amended the Clean Water Act in 2016 to create the Columbia River Basin Restoration Program. Since then, he has used his position on the Appropriations Committee to fight for robust funding for the program.

In August 2022, Senators Merkley and Wyden were joined by EPA Administrator Michael S. Regan at Broughton Beach in Portland to announce the first wave of grants from the program that were awarded funding from the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law to reduce toxics in fish and water throughout the Columbia Basin.

"We are making tremendous strides in understanding the challenges of water quality and salmon recovery in the Columbia River Basin," said EPA Regional Administrator Casey Sixkiller. "Working with our many talented partners in Oregon and across the Basin, we are expanding our efforts to support environmental and human health."

Today's announcement completes EPA's awards available for Columbia River Basin Restoration Program funding through the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law.

A full list and description of each of the latest 18 projects and programs--including the seven efforts in Oregon--can be found HERE.

The 2023 Tribal Grants to Reduce Toxics in the Columbia River Basin are as follows:

"From our water code: Water keeps all our bodies for us. Cuus is a part of everything. It is within natitayt (the people), it is within tiicam (the land), and it is within nusux (the salmon). It is essential for the survival of all life. Cold, clean, healthy water is the life blood of the land. This funding is an important step toward protecting cold clean water," said Mason K. Murphy, Energy and Environmental Sciences Program Manager for the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation.

"We are pleased to partner with EPA to reduce toxic pollution. As long-time stewards of the land and water in the Willamette Valley, the Grand Ronde are committed to protecting and restoring clean water, salmon, and healthy communities," said Cheryle A. Kennedy, Chairwoman, Grand Ronde Tribal Council.

The 2023 Toxic Reduction Lead Grants in the Columbia River Basin are as follows:

"Working across the interior Columbia Basin from ranches on Oregon's John Day River to barley farms on Snake River tributaries in Idaho to commercial development in Bend and Spokane and Boise, the project builds a market-based movement of partnering organizations and conservation organizations and Tribes working together to inspire countless voluntary landowner actions across the basin to protect water quality and enhance climate resiliency," Dan Kent, Co-Founder and Executive Director, Salmon-Safe said.

"DEQ is excited to see this funding coming to Oregon and the Columbia River Basin to support our work on the ground with communities," said Oregon DEQ Director Leah Feldon. "This is one of North America's largest basins and home to so many cultural, natural and economic resources - it's important we do our part to reduce the impacts of toxics."

"Methylmercury threatens communities in the Columbia River Basin. Reductions in the agricultural runoff that help fuel methylmercury production can be easily achieved by converting surface irrigated fields to sprinkler irrigation systems. The barrier to implementing thousands of these upgrades in the Mid-Snake Basin (Eastern Oregon and Western Idaho) is not lack of producer interest. It's simply not anyone's job to solve the bigger funding, timing, and coordination barriers that currently inhibit project adoption at speed and scale. The Freshwater Trust, in partnership with a Coordinating Committee of regional funders and implementers, will use advanced watershed analytics to identify priority clusters of projects, make simple and financially compelling offers to producers to install new equipment, and work with local water user groups to continuously build up a queue of shovel-ready projects. We're excited EPA is giving us the opportunity to demonstrate a bigger, faster pathway forward that can benefit so many communities," said Tim Wigington, Vice President of Finance and Policy, The Freshwater Trust.

"Urban stormwater is the number one threat to clean water in the Willamette Valley- and we have brought partners together to provide solutions that create both habitat and better water quality in our urban neighborhoods. The Urban Waters and Wildlife Partnership (UWWP), led by the Long Tom Watershed Council, addresses this challenging problem through working with businesses to design and install Trout Friendly Landscapes on commercial and industrial properties throughout Eugene and Springfield. The Partnership is comprised of the Cities of Eugene & Springfield, Lane County, Willamalane, Eugene Water & Electric Board, Springfield Utility Board, Metro Wastewater Management Commission, Upper Willamette Soil & Water Conservation District, Cascade Pacific Resource Conservation & Development (CPRCD), and all four regional Watershed Councils: McKenzie, Middle & Coast Fork of the Willamette and Long Tom. As the Toxics Lead, CPRCD will disperse EPA funding to UWWP

projects and partners. Funds will support the expansion of the partnership's work to include new projects such as Lane County's Stormwater Basin Cleaning Assistance Program (SCAP)," said Kirk Shimeall, Executive Director, Cascade Pacific Resource Conservation & Development.

"The School Stormwater Reduction Program is a profound investment in clean water and healthier communities. Thanks to Senator Merkley's leadership and the Columbia River Basin Restoration Act, we're installing stormwater treatment infrastructure/facilities at schools in Oregon and Washington -- reducing the amount of toxic pollution entering local waterways while also transforming parking lots and schoolyards into watershed science learning laboratories for students," said Elaine Placido, Executive Director, Lower Columbia Estuary Partnership.

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